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# Bulletin of The Detroit Institute of Arts of the City of Detroit



MADONNA AND CHILD  
CORNELIS VAN CLEVE  
1520-1567  
GIFT OF C. EDMUND DELBOS

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## A MADONNA BY CORNELIS VAN CLEVE

Mr. C. Edmund Delbos has recently given, in memory of his mother, a charming small *Madonna and Child* by the rare sixteenth century painter Cornelis van der Beke van Cleve (1520-67) of Antwerp.<sup>1</sup> It belongs to a period, at the middle of the sixteenth century, when Flemish painting had assimilated the ideal of serenely perfect physical beauty which had originated with Correggio, Raphael and Leonardo da Vinci, half a century before. One can see something of Correggio in this Madonna in the perfection of form, the soft chiaroscuro and the veiled expression. But the sixteenth century Italian ideal of beauty is here absorbed and made new by a quite distinct personality. The Madonna, dressed in dark red, holds the Christ child in her arms, pressing his cheek against her own, while the child grasps her scarf and chin; but in spite of the playfulness of the gestures, the mood of the two figures is one of melancholy. Mother and child are united by a sad dream of future separation and anguish rather than by happy natural affection.

In its sadness the picture reflects its age: Cornelis van Cleve was a contemporary of Pieter Bruegel. But he displays another side of the Antwerp tradition which, hitherto, had hardly been represented in our collection. The idealized figures of Cornelis van Cleve and the realism of Bruegel were the two sides of Flemish painting as it existed then at Antwerp, the most flourishing center of Flemish art in the sixteenth century. It is valuable for our historical perspective to have both sides represented in the museum; for although the balance of interest goes now to the realistic movement, at that time and for three centuries after the

idealistic side was thought the more important.

At the beginning of the sixteenth century when the Italian Renaissance was at its height, Correggio, or Cornelis' father, Joos van Cleve, might paint the Madonna and Child as a group of radiant lyrical happiness. But Cornelis' life lay already within the shadow of the religious wars. In temperament, one may say, Cornelis van Cleve was a Correggio without gayety. There is actually an *Adoration of the Shepherds* by him in the royal collection at Windsor Castle, which was for centuries called Correggio.<sup>2</sup> The character of his art is a mixture of sweetness and pathos.

We know, in general, almost nothing of the personal life of the Flemish artists of this time: except for a few bald dates they live in their pictures alone. Cornelis van Cleve is an exception to this rule. His strange fortune impressed itself on his fellow artists and was passed down in studio tradition, so that one catches sight of him through a rift in the almost universal darkness which shrouds the personal history, the hopes and ambitions and disappointments of the other artists of this time. He was the son of Joos van Cleve, an important painter of the first half of the sixteenth century in Antwerp. Van Mander, the historian of this period of Flemish art, unfortunately confused the biographies of the father and son, so that it has only recently been determined that the singular and tragic story he tells about "Foolish Cleve" refers to the son, Cornelis.<sup>3</sup>

Joos van der Beke van Cleve, the father, after quite a successful life, died in 1540, leaving a widow and two children. Apparently he did not

leave much fortune for in 1542 the widow was forced to sell her house and her husband's effects. The son, who was not much more than twenty, was already a very clever and talented painter of portraits and religious subjects. He must have been immediately successful, for he was presently able to marry and to buy two houses in the "Koningstraat". At this time the whole of Europe was overshadowed by the overpowering greatness of Charles V and the Spanish monarchy. Charles and his son Philip II of Spain were not only the richest and most powerful monarchs of Europe, but the greatest art patrons. The heads of all ambitious artists seem also to have been turned by the tremendous successes of Holbein in England and Antonio Moro in Lisbon. In 1554, when Philip of Spain married Mary, Queen of England, Cornelis van Cleve resolved to throw up his brilliant position at Antwerp and to go to London, hoping to be made court painter. We know that he even sold one of his houses in Antwerp (1555) to finance the journey. There were already in London Antonio Moro of Utrecht, and a young painter from Ghent, Lucas de Heere, who seems to have told the story afterward to van Mander.

Unfortunately for Cornelis' hopes when he arrived in London, Philip had just received a shipment of Italian pictures, including Titian's *Venus and Adonis*, and was completely absorbed in Italian art. Antonio Moro, who appears to have acted as artistic adviser to the court, seems to have labored sincerely but in vain to interest the court in Cornelis' work. Driven wild by vanity and disappointment, Cornelis' reason gave way. He argued that his were the best pictures and the most valuable in the world, and accused Moro of playing him false. He raged at him, calling him

a conceited idiot, and telling him it would be better for him "to go back to Utrecht, to safeguard his wife from the canons of the church". When Moro lost his temper, Cornelis crawled under the table and Moro seems to have realized that the man was no longer responsible. "Finally", says van Mander, "Cleeve became so mentally disturbed that he did strange things; he varnished his clothing, cape and bonnet with turpentine varnish, and in this glittering costume went into the street. He painted the backs of his panels, too, because, he said, even if they were placed backwards, people would still see something by his hand. Whenever he got hold of paintings he had done before, he tried to destroy them, pretending he was going to improve them. This was a pity and a great shame." The rest of his career is briefly told. His mind was permanently deranged. In 1560 he was sent back to Antwerp to his family. His property was gradually dissipated by the cost of his care. In 1564 his daughter's husband, a merchant, was appointed his guardian, and in 1567 he died. Meanwhile in London Lucas de Heere, who had watched with wonder this shipwreck of an artist much above him in fame and ability, without any difficulty fell into the patronage which Cornelis van Cleve missed. Finally even Cornelis' name was lost, for while the story of "Foolish Cleve" was told by Lucas de Heere to van Mander, the latter confused it with the life of Joos van Cleve and the whole episode was attributed to the father. Of his works, all were unsigned except a copy in Vienna of his father's Antwerp altar. Although they were recognized as the work of one hand, they were first tentatively given to Lambert Lombard, but in recent times have been assigned with reasonable certainty again to van Cleve.

The Madonna and child was apparently one of his most successful themes. Friedländer<sup>4</sup> has lately listed twelve pictures of this subject by him. The present picture was, oddly enough, called the work of Mario del Fiore, a seventeenth century Neapolitan painter, until it was recognized by Dr.

Valentiner some years ago as the work of van Cleve. This gift to the museum thus brings into our collection one of the interesting figures of the sixteenth century and helps also to give us a better understanding of the world from which Pieter Bruegel sprang.

E. P. RICHARDSON.

1—Oak panel: H. 10 $\frac{3}{4}$  inches; W. 7 $\frac{5}{8}$  inches. Reg. No. 38. Closely related Madonnas are to be found in the Berlin Museum (No. 653) and in the Johnson Collection, Philadelphia (No. 403).

2—Reproduced in the Burlington Magazine, XXVI (1914-15) p. 176.

3—See Friedländer, *Altniederländische Malerei*, IX; Lionel Cust and F. Jos. van den Branden, *Burlington Magazine*, XXVI (1914-15) p. 169 ff; Sir Martin Conway, *The Van Eycks and Their Followers*, p. 413 ff; C. Justi, *Jahrbuch der preuss. Kunstm. XVI* (1895) p. 13 ff.

4—Friedländer, *Altniederländische Malerei*, XIV, p. 117.

## A LANDSCAPE BY HERCULES SEGHERS

Thanks to the gift of a remarkable landscape by Hercules Seghers<sup>1</sup> through the Founders Society, one of the great personalities in Dutch art is now represented in the Institute collection. To understand its full beauty we must in imagination add the colors to the black and white reproduction: the golden brown rugged land of the foreground, where the last rays of the setting sun filtre through the clefts of the rocks and the leaves of the trees, the luminous blue jade-green of the river behind the church spire in the shady middleground and the light transparent blue of the distant hills and expanse of water. A glowing evening sky hovers over the landscape, the delicate pink light reflected upon the sharp points of the grey-green mountain peak rising unexpectedly on the other side of the valley.

This color scheme is based upon the three planes of sixteenth century landscape painting, brown, grey and blue, in receding order, yet it is combined with realistic observation refined to a degree unknown to any of the earlier artists. In the rich composition

also of varied forms of rocky and hilly mountains, of wooded and open plains, of houses and waterways, we are reminded of the panoramic views of the "world-landscape" conception which prevailed from Patinir to Breugel. But here the details are more subordinated to the compact composition: and while it has all the grandeur and solitude of the best of those early landscapes, it has also the atmospheric treatment and the loose fluid technic characteristic of the time of Frans Hals, to which Seghers belonged. The scene seems to portray a portion of the Maas valley which the artist visited sometime before his journey to the Alps, if we can believe a reconstruction of his journeys by modern biographers.

Seghers' great historical importance lies in the fact that he brings to completion sixteenth century landscape art—the first of its kind to represent pure landscape without religious staffage—and connects it with the future subjective style of Rembrandt. The latter was, by the way, a great admirer of Seghers, owned eight of his paintings and several plates by him, and his

earlier landscapes were influenced by Seghers' art.

But Seghers is to us more than a historical figure. It is not accidental that he has been rediscovered only within the past thirty years and that appreciation of him grew with the advance made in modern art. He belongs to the artists of the past who seem to presage modern conceptions and technique. After his paintings were rediscovered by Dr. Bode and his sixty etchings had been published in an excellent work by the Berlin Print Room shortly before the World War, the best book on the artist and his strange psychology, by W. Fraenger, appeared in 1922. In this book (and in another by K. Pfister in 1921) he is characterized as an "expressionist" and compared with the modern German expressionists, whose art at that time was at its height.

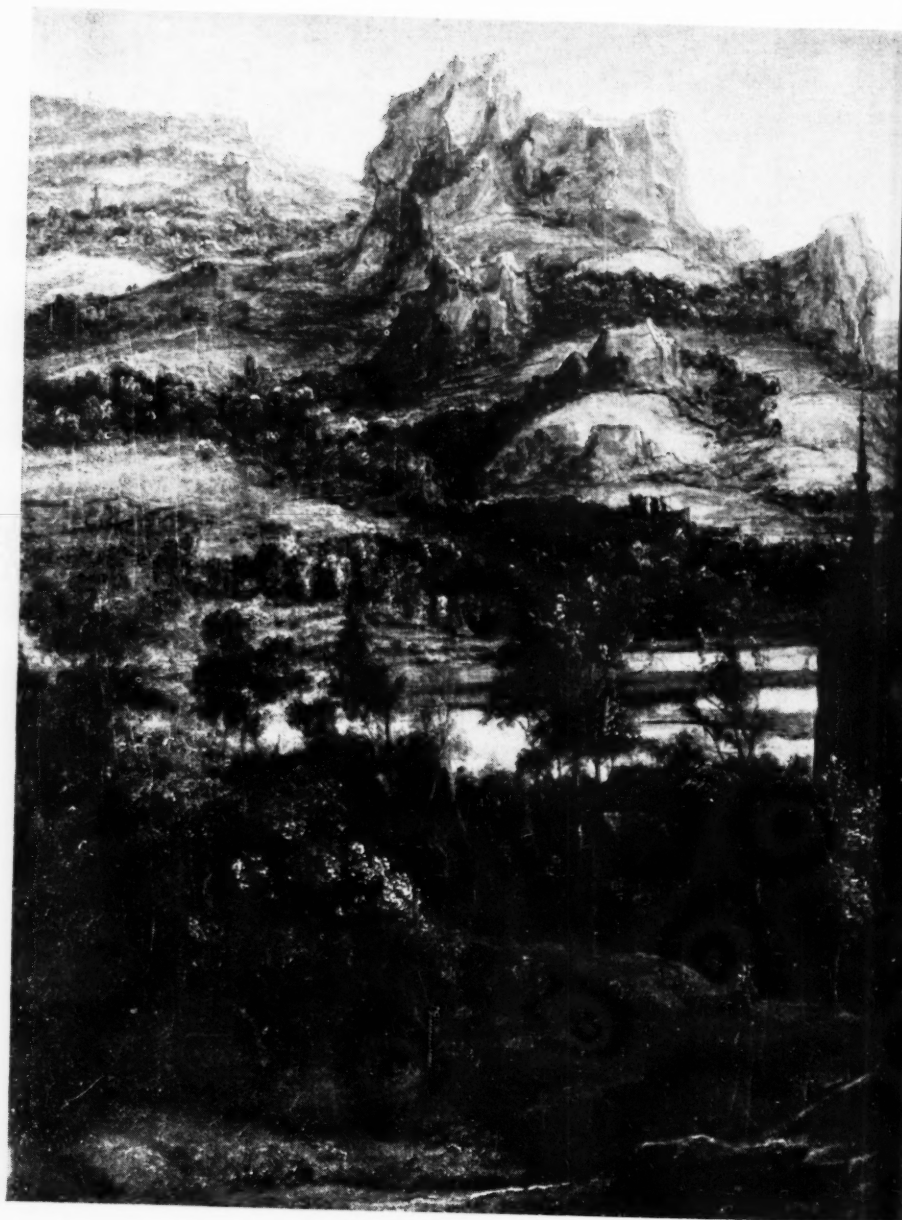
Seghers may be called the predecessor of Van Gogh, not only in his artistic efforts but also in his tragic life. He was a similarly intense, searching nature. Isolated from the movement of art in his time and from the world about him, he was misunderstood by his contemporaries, and poverty and neglect led to an early tragic end.

The experimental character of his art was expressed most markedly in his rare color etchings: weird compositions, alike earthly and fantastic. The style of his early paintings as well as the forceful penetrating linear style of his etchings, with their strongly incised curves covering the whole surface of his plates, may well be compared with Van Gogh's work. These early works are perhaps the most personal expressions of his art. Their strange views of deserted Alpine valleys, with disrupted rocks and decayed trees, speak of a nature as

somber and wild as that of Van Gogh in his last stage. Our painting, obviously a late work, is not of this kind, but in its melancholy mood it speaks clearly of the sad experience of an artist who finds his only pleasure in life in a complete absorption in his work.

Fortunately, he at least had the satisfaction of knowing what his art was worth. We are told that he lived in poverty and misery, that he had the printers send baskets full of prints to the market to be sold as wrapping paper for butter and cheese, that he had to cut up his last large etching plate to make the prints more salable, since the dealers did not want to give for his prints as much as the copper alone was worth. But we are also told, he said some day art lovers would give four times more for a print from the reduced plate than he asked for one from the original plate. This became true soon after he died. His prints are now worth perhaps even a hundred times what the artist asked, for they belong to the most valued examples of earlier epochs.

Hercules Seghers was born in 1589-90, probably at Haarlem. At Amsterdam he became a pupil of Gillis van Coninxloo, the rare artist, one of whose forest scenes has recently been acquired by our Institute. In 1612 he became a member of the Guild in Haarlem at the same time as Esaias van de Velde and Willem Buytewech. Most of his life he was active in Amsterdam, but for some years he was in Utrecht and also in The Hague. He was married twice, first to a woman fourteen years older than he; he had one illegitimate daughter. There are documents which speak of his debts. Contemporary writers tell us that he lived in poverty and that his wife complained that he used the bed linens







and shirts for making prints (it is a fact that many of his etchings were printed on linen). Misunderstood by artists as well as by his family, he tried to console himself in drink. One day he came home drunk, lost his balance climbing the steep Dutch staircase, fell and died. His wife is mentioned as a widow in 1638.

His work consists of about sixty prints, of which 170 states are known. Less than twenty paintings are thus

far known by him. But from the inventories of his time we may conjecture that more will turn up in due course, for thirty-three paintings were owned by an Amsterdam dealer in 1640, while Rembrandt owned eight and Jan van Capelle five. The present painting is the second to find its way into an American museum collection; there is another small landscape in the Johnson Collection, Philadelphia.

W. R. VALENTINER

1—Acc. No. 38.68. Canvas. Dimensions: *Height*: 15 3/4"; *Width*: 25". Presented by the Founders Society from the General Membership and Donations Fund. — The best account of Hercules Seghers is by Eduard Trautscholdt, in Thieme-Becker, *Künstlerlexikon*, 1936.

## AN EARLY CHRISTIAN SARCOPHAGUS

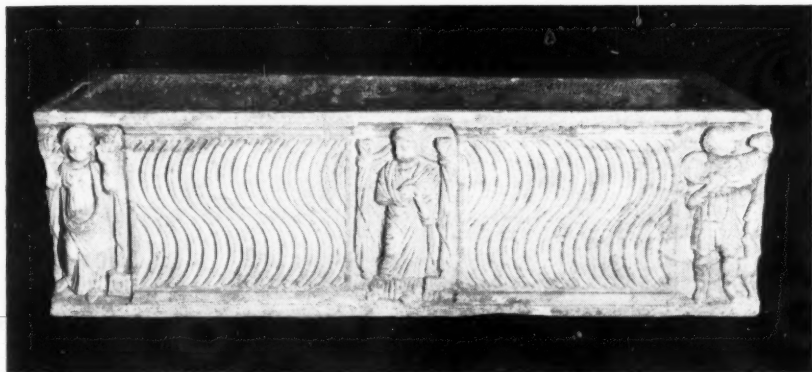
Along the south wall of Gallery 12 stands an Early Christian sarcophagus<sup>1</sup>, which at some time during the 3rd century A. D. contained the body of a Roman Christian who died and was buried in the new faith, with its symbols carved upon his tomb.

The Early Christian period, while its monuments may lack the grandeur of later works, holds for the student of types and traditions an interest not be found in subsequent epochs, when the stories and characters of the Christian legend had become fixed as doctrine. Compiling, editing, and sorting the New Testament narratives, and the final adoption of one version against others, was a matter not of a few years but of centuries. We who in our time in speaking of the Bible refer without thinking to the King James Version of 1611, are very prone to forget that the New Testament as translated in that splendid document dates not from the 1st century but from the 4th, and that even this 4th century list of Athanasius was not finally ratified as correct until the Council in Trullo of 692, six and a half centuries after Christ's death. This early period, when the

Christian religion was struggling toward power and consistency, offers us many monuments, as well as a number of writings, in which the tentative character of the new faith is clearly disclosed.

The propagators of Christianity in the Roman world were largely Greeks; the earliest editions of the New Testament were in Greek, not Latin or Syriac. They came from such cities as Ephesus, Antioch, Tarsus, and Corinth, old Greek trading centers long in contact with the Orient. They were artisans, tradesmen, teachers,—many of them were slaves—instead of the conquerors they had once been. Among these defeated and oppressed, but intensely speculative and philosophical people, who for four centuries had been exposed to the mystical religions of the east, the Christian faith found immediate recognition. It offered them as a reward for the very sort of lives they led an eternal glory beside which the material splendors of Rome or Asia were insignificant. However, the personalities attached to the doctrine were extremely shadowy. With such a state of confusion in the literature, it can be seen that a similar





EARLY CHRISTIAN SARCOPHAGUS  
ROMAN  
3RD CENTURY A. D.

disorder must necessarily have prevailed in its illustrations. An unknown man of Nazareth, seen during his lifetime by relatively few people, and certainly not by artists, who was executed during the reign of Tiberius, became the source and symbol of a religion whose literature gave, even at its most complete, no indication of his appearance. What had Christ looked like? How had he dressed? No one really knew, and so the artists turned to types in their repertoires which approximated in one way or another the attributes of Christ. As we have pointed out, the first converts were Greeks; they therefore embodied Christ at first as a pagan god. For Christ the Good Shepherd, who was "not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matth. XV, 25), there were two familiar classical figures which might serve as prototypes: Hermes Kriophorus and Aristæus. Hermes Kriophorus ("Hermes the Ram-Bearer"), as the protector of cattle and sheep, is represented carrying a ram upon his back. It was Hermes also, who, with the title "Psychopompus" conducted the dead to Hades. Aristæus, the son of Apollo and the nymph Cyrene, was

worshipped in ancient Greece as the first cultivator of the vine and the olive (both plants important in Christian symbolism); he possessed the arts of healing and prophesy, and averted destructive forces from the fields.

But there were more sides to the character of Jesus than could be pictured by such simple attributes as a ram or a shepherd's crook. He was also a teacher of men and a philosopher. It was no shepherd youth who argued with the doctors in the temple; the Sermon on the Mount is the discourse of a man deeply interested in ethical problems. Therefore in his role of teacher and orator a different prototype was used. We are familiar with the Graeco-Roman orator pose: a figure in toga and sandals standing with feet slightly apart a *volumen* or roll in his hand, and a *cista* or roll-box at his side. Familiar examples are the famous statues of Sophocles in the Lateran, and Demosthenes in the Vatican in Rome. These poses were taken over by the Early Christian artists to represent Christ as the persuasive orator of the sermons on human problems, rather than as a shepherd of souls.

Even the face of Christ was a matter of debate. In different parts of the Roman world he may have long hair and no beard, or short hair and no beard, or long hair and a beard. In his crucifixion he may be dressed in the long gown or *colobium*, or he may be unclad.

Rome, the center of the world until the fourth century, drew upon all its provinces for workmen, Hellenistic Greeks from Alexandria and Antioch, Gaulish stone-cutters from the south of France, glass-makers from the Rhine. In any great metropolis the idiosyncrasies of the provinces may all be found mingled together, and Rome was no exception. The workman who carved this sarcophagus used on the right-hand corner a bearded Good Shepherd, a type originating according to Wulff<sup>2</sup>, in Alexandria, and the beardless Christ as orator in the center. On the left-hand corner stands a figure of a woman praying with uplifted hands. She may be variously interpreted as the Virgin Mary, the Church, or as the soul of the departed, who prays before the throne of God. It was the classical custom to pray with hands outstretched, not with folded hands as the rite is performed now. At the ends of the sarcophagus are carved baskets filled with fruit, a Hellenistic motif beloved of the stone-carvers, here symbolizing the plenteous joys of paradise.

It will be noticed that the scene most familiar to us of all those in the Christian story, the Crucifixion, is omitted. This was done for two reasons. Before the Edict of Milan, which in 313 established toleration

throughout the Empire, Christians, were anxious to avoid persecution, and therefore chose scenes which might, if necessary, be given a pagan interpretation: the orator, the shepherd god, and the praying woman. The death of Christ, and their own persecutions, were still too near their own experience to make so graphic a reminder of suffering endurable. It was only after the beginning of the fourth century that the scenes we commonly regard as essentially Christian appeared with frequency, when the new religion had established itself as a state power capable of enforcing its will.

The sarcophagus is of the same type as one from the Cimitero di San Callisto, dated by Von Sybel<sup>3</sup> in the early years of the 3rd century. The San Callisto example has the same center figure in its crudely designed draped niche, with two Good Shepherds, one bearded, the other not (!) at the corners. The strigil decoration, so-called from its resemblance to the scrapers with which athletes in classic times removed the dust of the gymnasium from their bodies, was first combined with Christian-pagan motifs in Alexandria<sup>4</sup>. It is quite possible that the sarcophagus was ordered from Alexandria and transported to Rome; an entire group of sarcophagi, the "columnar" type, were manufactured in Asia Minor and exported all over the Mediterranean.

It is small wonder that, when in different parts of the Mediterranean world different predilections and traditions worked upon early Christianity, that we should find such inconsistency in the figure of Christ as we find represented on this sarcophagus.

PARKER LESLEY

1—Marble. Height: 2 ft. 1½ inches; Width: 2 ft. 5 inches; Length: 7 ft. 1½ inches. Acc. No. 26,138. Purchased 1926. Illustrated: *Supplement to the Bulletin of the Detroit Institute of Arts*, February, 1937, p. 7.

2—Cf. Oskar Wulff, *Altchristliche und Byzantinische Kunst*, Berlin, 1914, (*Handbuch der Kunstwissenschaft*), Vol. I, p. 103.

3—Ludwig von Sybel, *Christliche Antike*, Marburg, 1909, Vol. II, p. 174, and Fig. 8.

4—Wulff, *op. cit.*, p. 106.

## MICHIGAN ARTISTS EXHIBITION

The annual exhibition for Michigan artists, will be held from November 15 to December 18. During the twenty years since this feature of our exhibition season was started the number of practising artists in the Detroit colony has grown enormously, and the growing importance of Michigan's place in American art is emphasized by the increasing number of entries from the local colony in national exhibitions.

Saturday, October 29, is the last day for receiving entries. The jury this year, selected by vote of the exhibitors, will consist of John Carroll, Sarkis Sarkisian, John Pappas and Walt Speck of Detroit, Jean Paul Slusser and Carleton W. Angell of Ann Arbor, and Jaroslav Brozik of Flint.

More than \$1300.00 in awards and purchase prizes will be distributed among the exhibitors this year.

### PRIZES

The Scarab Club Medal will be awarded by the Art Committee of the Club for the most important contribution to the success of the exhibition.

The Detroit Museum of Art Founders Society Prize of \$200 will be awarded for the best work in the exhibition by a resident Michigan artist, regardless of subject or medium.

The Anna Scripps Whitcomb Prize of \$100 will be awarded for the best painting or sculpture exemplifying traditional or academic qualities.

The Friends of Modern Art Prize of \$100, given by Robert H. Tannahill, will be awarded by this Society for the best picture exemplifying modern tendencies in art.

The Mrs. Standish Backus Prize of \$100 will be awarded for the best landscape in the exhibition.

The Walter Piper Prize of \$50 will be awarded for the best figure subject in oil on canvas painted during the year 1937.

The Mrs. Albert Kahn Prize of \$50 will be awarded for the best water color in the exhibition.

A Purchase Prize of \$200, contributed by W. J. Hartwig and E. Raymond Field, will be awarded by a special jury selected by the donors.

The Mrs. George Kamperman Purchase Prize will be used by the donor for the purchase of a work in the exhibition.

The Lillian Henkel Haass Purchase Prize of \$100 will be used for the purchase of a work for the permanent collection of the Detroit Institute of Arts.

The Mrs. Ralph H. Booth Purchase Prize of \$100 will be awarded by the donor and the Art Director, Dr. W. R. Valentiner.

The Mrs. Owen R. Skelton Purchase Prize of \$100 will be awarded by a special jury selected by the donor.

The Society of Art, Poetry and Music Prize will be used by the donor for the purchase of a work in the exhibition.

The Etching Purchase Prize of \$50, contributed by Mr. Hal H. Smith, will be awarded for the best etching in the exhibition, the print to become a part of the permanent collection of the Detroit Institute of Arts.

The exhibition will open Tuesday evening, November 15, with a reception given by the Women's Committee of the Founders Society.

## CALENDAR FOR NOVEMBER

### EXHIBITIONS

- Nov. 15—Dec. 15: Michigan Artists Exhibition.  
Nov. 1—14: Exhibition of Posters (in the print collection).  
Alger House: Nov. 6—Dec. 18: English Art of the 18th and 19th Centuries.

### TUESDAY EVENING LECTURES

Given by the museum staff in coöperation with the Archæological Society of Detroit, Tuesday evenings at 8:30 in the lecture hall.

- Nov. 1: *The Dilemma of the Modern Artist*, by John Morse.  
Nov. 8: *The English Cathedral, a Study in Folkways*, by Parker Lesley.  
Nov. 15: No lecture. *Opening, Michigan Artists Exhibition*.  
Nov. 22: *American Art in Retrospect*, by Clyde H. Burroughs.  
Nov. 29: *The Temple of Bel at Palmyra*, by Henri Seyrig, Director of Antiquities in French Syria.

### LECTURES IN THE GALLERIES

(chairs provided)

A SURVEY OF THE COLLECTIONS. *Thursday afternoons at 3:00; Sunday afternoons at 2:30.*

- Nov. 3 and 6: *Far Eastern Art: China*  
Nov. 10 and 13: *Far Eastern Art: Japan*  
Nov. 17 and 20: *American Art before Columbus*

### SPECIAL TALKS BY THE CURATORS

*Friday afternoons at 3:00*

- Nov. 4: *From Old Bruegel to Rubens*, by E. P. Richardson.  
Nov. 11: *The Golden Age of Florence and the Rise of the Venetian School*, by Perry T. Rathbone.  
Nov. 18: *Eighteenth Century and Early Republican Painting in American*, by Parker Lesley.